1:Beaglehole and Beaglehole E-5 (1934-5) 1938 Pukapukans

Lata (1). As has already been mentioned, little use was made of white magic in economic activities.

The only black magic indulged in seems to have been based on suggestion; no bait objects were used. A priest might silently or orally curse a man with sickness, or else pray to his god either to send an evil substance to eat out an enemy's vitals or send an evil familiar spirit, the spirit of one newly dead, for instance, to enter a man for the same purpose. This was done solely through the power of the priest to communicate with the god and not by using or working upon material objects. When it was known that a man had been thus mentioned to a god by a priest, the man would sicken unless he could get another priest to apply to another god for counter-protection.

Mention has been made (p. 328) of the nooses (*matapili*) that Wotoa and Te Yoa saw hanging from the *puka* tree of Tangi which were used to trap and strangle spirits. Gill reports that he procured from Pukapuka an "erevaerua" (soul trap), which was used by the priests in the upper world to trap the souls of living victims (pl. 6). Gill (10, p. 181) writes:

> If a person had the misfortune to offend the "sacred men", or were very ill, a soul-trap would be suspended by night from a branch of one of the gigantic laurel trees (*puka*) overshadowing his dwelling. If the family enquired "the sin for which the soul-trap was set up," some ceremonial offense against the gods would of course be assigned. The priest would sit opposite watching. If an insect or small bird chanced to fly through one of the loops, it was asserted that the soul of the culprit, assuming this form, had passed into the trap. The demon VAERUA,[*] or "spirit" presiding over the spirit world, was believed to hurry off the unlucky soul to the shades, to feast upon. It would speedily be known throughout the island that So-and-so had lost his soul, and great would be the lamentation.
>
> The friends of the unhappy man would seek to propitiate the sorcerer by large presents of food and property, begging him to intercede with dread VAERUA for the restoration of the soul. This was sometimes accomplished; but at other times the priests reported that his prayers were unavailing, and VAERUA could not be induced to send back the spirit to reinhabit the body. The culprit fully believing all that the priest said—was he not the mouth-piece of the gods, and cognisant of the secrets of the spirit-world?—gave up all hope. His friends mourned over him as one dead; and at last the poor fellow faded away through sheer mental distress at having his spirit ensnared.
>
> In cases of mere sickness, where the friends were anxious to know whether the sick man would get well again, if the priest reported that his spirit did not enter the snare, it was inferred that he would recover.
>
> I enquired why some of the loops were so large, whilst others were so small. The "sacred-man" said to me, testily, "Don't you know that there are different sorts of souls —some small and others large?" I understood him to mean that the large loops were to entrap the souls of adults, the smaller ones to catch the souls of infants. The words used would imply that the large loops were for the souls of chiefs, and the small ones for the souls of common people.

The Pukapukan for *era vaerua* would be *yele vaelua* (noose spirit-like o spirit-like noose), but the word *vaelua* would rarely be used in this sense; a

[*] Presumably Gill here refers to the departmented god, Te Atua Vaelua.

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more correct name would be *yele mauli*. Many informants were repeatedly questioned about this soul trap, separately and together, and all agreed that Gill must have confused a bird trap or bird noose which he saw hanging to a tree with the story he heard of the *matapili* noose in the Underworld. One type of bird noose, *yele manu* (fig. 4,*b*), consisted of loops of sennit suspended from a *puka* tree. It is significant that Gill talks about a birdlike representative of a soul passing into the *ere vaerua*. It is likely, I think, that in order to blacken the past, a convert made for Gill what he said was a soul trap. From the old chant, "Maka taku kupu ko te tonoanga", informants quoted the following phrases to confirm their point that the noose was used in the Underworld only:

Na yelea ko te talakelake	You were tied to the *talakelake* tree
Wakawiwi ake te mauli, koa mate, koa elo	(Your) soul was tangled (in the trap), died, stank,
Wakatautili ai taua i te pu o te puka a Tangi,	We were both thrown to the foot of the *puka* tree of Tangi,
Wakaalu ko te wale poutini . . .	Entered the house of a thousand posts (the house of Leva) . . .

If the soul trap was really an instrument of witchcraft, as Gill was assured, then it acted through the force of suggestion. The priest did not work over the insect or bird that passed through the noose with incantations in order to provoke sickness or death.

Several informants were questioned on different occasions as to their knowledge of black magic. Examples of black magic in western Europe were adduced to give them confidence, but even this lead got no results. Even if informants have willfully forgotten material on sorcery which must to them smack of heathen practices, one might expect some survival of precautions directed against sorcery in the treatment of objects closely connected with the person. But the Pukapukan customs governing the disposal of objects charged with high personality tension, as compared with customs elsewhere in Polynesia, where fear of sorcery led to rigorous tapus or the disposal of such objects, indicate that there was extremely little fear of sorcery in Pukapuka:

> The sea took care of adult excreta, and of most child excreta; no precautions are taken today to dispose of excreta of children too young to go to the sea. Adults expectorate anywhere. Finger and toe nails are cut anywhere; formerly they were bitten off and spat out onto the ground. According to informants, the hair was rarely cut during life, and was worn long by both sexes. Some informants said that hair clippings were buried; others said that hair was often cut from a dead person, particularly from the head of a deceased favorite child, and the hair plaited into a malo or else into a cord by which pearl-shell ornaments were hung on the breast. Formerly, if a woman's hair fell into food, the food was considered spoiled by this contact. When a tooth pained, it was pulled out, taken to the god house of the lineage and deposited there with a prayer to the god of the lineage that he send a new tooth to replace the one thus given to the god. Old clothes were burned or used as rags. Today clothes are worn to rags

[See p. 64, category 116—analyst.]

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and then allowed to lie about until they are needed as waste cloth. The soiled sleeping mats of adults may never be used by children, lest they be made sick by contact with the stains. There is no other precaution adopted about sleeping mats or sitting mats; these are used by members of the household or visitors.

GHOSTS

The fear of ghosts (*aitu*, old term; *yitolo*, modern term) is all-pervading in Pukapuka. Not only children, who are brought up with a fear of ghosts, but adults also are thoroughly afraid of them and their power. Children are never left alone in the night lest ghosts worry them. In times of sickness, ghosts are supposed to be particularly troublesome, and it is necessary at these times to be especially careful of the well-being of ailing children, who are not left unguarded even during the day. Ghosts are believed to cause sickness.

SICKNESS AND HYGIENE

IDEOLOGY

The Pukapukan had no conception of the physical causation of sickness or physical disability, unrelated to immoral, sacrilegious, or antisocial behavior of the afflicted individual or his relatives. Sickness was sent by gods or by malicious spirits (*aitu*), in order to punish or revenge the breaking of a tapu, or other antisocial behavior. Punishment by sickness was considered perfectly just, even though the sick person had himself committed no infraction of tapu; all the members of the guilty one's family or household group were jointly responsible.

Types of antisocial behavior punished by sickness were infractions of the following: economic tapus, through non-observance or stealing; rules governing the disposal of property at death or general economic contracts; rules governing the treatment of wife, children, relatives, and old people; sexual tapus, committing of incest, adultery; obligations based on kinship or friendship relations; and tapus on religious or ceremonial objects and structures. Deaths caused by suicide or homicide, or resulting from injuries received in homicidal encounters were the only ones for which a material cause, unaffected by spiritual interference, was recognized. Even here, however, a closer analysis would probably show that death or injury was due to the withdrawal of protection by the god from one of his worshipers because the worshiper had at some time violated rules.

Sickness in general was *maki atua* (god-sent sickness). Special names for types of sickness sent by gods, were: *maki kai kiko*, sickness caused by incest; *maki atua kino*, sickness caused by ancestral spirits. No single word applies to accidental injury, which is given a descriptive term, as *maki no te yeuvaga o te atua ki lalo*, sickness resulting from a fall from a tree caused by a god.